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ABSTRACT

Most colleges and community colleges today have some type of educational opportunity program. The complexity and variety of services offered by such programs differ significantly. One of the most comprehensive programs of this type is discussed which combines admissions, academic advising, and instructional support services, along with a precollege Upward Bound program within a single department. Three basic factors instrumental in making this program successful are detailed: (1) institutional commitment, (2) organizational structure, and (3) management system. (Author/LBH)

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A Comprehensive Program to Maximize Student Development for Disadvantaged and Minority Students

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Introduction.

During the late 1960's many attempts were made to provide equal access and opportunity for ethnic minorities in institutions of higher education. As a result of the turbulent social atmosphere of the time, many colleges and universities established programs aimed at providing increased opportunities. Tutoring, ethnic studies programs, flexible admissions standards, additional types of financial assistance, and counseling began to show up with regularity on campuses throughout the country. In most instances several types of assistance were combined into some type of "program" or "center". These programs have now been in existance for several years on many campuses nationwide and many have become an accepted part of those institutions. However, few such educational opportunity programs have any real support or power on the campus. Rather, they tend to exist as a sign of good faith, and as evidence that something is really being done to overcome serious academic disadvantages which students bring with them. In fact, many such programs do little but provide admission to students and send them into the classroom alone. At best, some provide part-time tutor-counselors who are usually full-time students and part-time employees with great interests and intentions, but little time to devote, and a lack of necessary skills. In fact, these para-professionals replace, rather than supplement professional counselors. Most programs also provide tutorial services for their students, generally limited to a few classes, and again often done by para-professionals on an "on call" basis.

However, many programs have moved beyond these initial attempts. One of the most comprehensive efforts of this type is the Experimental Program in Higher Education at the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee. Initiated in 1968, EPHE progressed through the initial stages of campus and faculty doubt, a small staff and budget, and a need to establish itself and its objectives. Beginning as an experimental project in the summer of 1968 with essentially no institutional support, it has since grown to the point that it has a staff of 22 full-time professionals, a budget of nearly half a million dollars, over 500 students enrolled each semester, and is one of the highest priority departments in the Division of Student Services. The documented success of the department in meeting its objectives over the last six years has justified its current status. In evaluating the program's growth and development, there are several factors which seem to have played a major role: (1) The program's ability to gain support from the institution; (2) the basic organizational structure of the department itself; and (3) the management system used to evaluate results. The program's basic commitment to continued improvement is also directly related to its success.

Institutional Commitment.

One of the unique aspects about the Experimental Program is the degree of institutional commitment which it has received from the campus and the University of Wisconsin System. The program

exists as a permanent department within the Division of Student Services and is funded by the same formula as all other campus departments. This insures that the program will not have to depend on volunteers, or student employees in lieu of professional staff. Such institutional funding creates more continuity of services and allows more realistic planning than do single year grants from outside sources. The amount of funding and its increasing size for the past several years have allowed the Experimental Program in Higher Education to increase both in size and in types of services to students. In addition, the obvious commitment on the part of the institution has allowed EPHE to seek and receive additional funds via grants from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The basic support for the program by the University has convinced the federal officials that there is a strong commitment to both the program itself, and to its basic objectives. On this basis, EPHE has been funded for the past four years by HEW to supplement its basic program and expand its services, particularly in the area of academic, instructional support.

In a University of Wisconsin Central Administration analysis paper dated July 1974 the Experimental Program in Higher Education was recognized as one of the outstanding programs of its kind in the UW System. Specifically, the report stated that "Past performance and rapid expansion of the project provide strong evidence

of the effectiveness of EPHE . . . The campus report provided an excellent example of identification of clear-cut objectives to be achieved through use of M/D funding and level of success in fulfilling those objectives." Such recognition and support at the highest level of administration is an absolute necessity for any program to survive and grow in the long run.

At the campus level, the same support and encouragement is forthcoming from the administration. As a department within the Division of Student Services, EPHE's Director sits on the Assistant Chancellor's Administrative Council, the policy-making body for the Division. This structure insures that concerns of the department are heard and realistically evaluated at the policy-making level. It also insures that there is frequent close contact between all of those departments who share similar concerns, and whose functions closely relate to each other. Not only does the structure of the Division itself insure that such contact occurs regularly, but in practice inter-departmental cooperation does exist and recognition of special problems faced by EPHE students has led to even better relationships with those departments most closely involved. In fact, the Experimental Program is the fourth highest priority department in a Division composed of 12 independent departments. Only the Department of Admissions and Records, the Health Center, and the Financial Aid Department receive higher priority than EPHE. During recent years the level of priority has been very important at UWM, and many other schools

which are faced with increasing costs. As funds are curtailed, those departments lowest in priority become severely limited or eliminated. As higher costs and decreasing enrollments continue throughout the nation, those programs which do not assert themselves as important components of the campus as a whole will find themselves being able to do little to meet the real needs of students.

Not only is it important for educational opportunity programs to receive the support of the administration, but it is equally, or more important, to have the support of campus faculty, and students. Initially, there was a great deal of mistrust of the Experimental Program among UWM faculty. It was strongly felt by many that the program would admit students who could not compete, and should not even attempt to do so. Or, that students admitted would be able to complete their degree by taking easy courses, graduate, and ultimately lower the standards of the institution itself. None of these have in fact taken place. The paper dealing with the Instructional Support component of the Experimental Program documents well, the relationship which has been established with four campus academic departments. This relationship typifies the kind of respect that the department has gained among academic departments and individual faculty members.

The regard which students have for the program is shown in several ways. One of the most obvious is the fact that students are one of the prime sources of referral for new students. It is

very common for an EPHE student to send a friend to the department to discuss possible admission or academic advising. Formal input from students is received from student members of the program's advisory committee, comprised of faculty and community representatives as well as students. In the long run the real measure of student support is seen in the numbers who are successful. As evidenced by program results discussed later, students admitted to the program have been very successful.

Structure.

The Experimental Program has been carefully structured, organizationally, to provide the most intensive services to students possible within a single department. Initially, the program defined its goals as the admission and retention of a specific population of students. Those goals remain basically the same today, as does the primary organizational structure. EPHE has three basic components at the college level, one primarily concerned with admission of applicants, and two concerned with methods of retention. Each component has an Assistant Director who reports to the Director regarding all component activities. In addition to the components at the college level, EPHE also has an Upward Bound component, which deals with a similar population of students at the high school level. The administrator of the Upward Bound component also reports to the director. The Associate Director is responsible for the daily business operations of the program, and assists the Director in overall program development. This basic structure allows the program to provide a

wide range of services within a single organizational unit. It allows program plans to be made upon reasonable amounts of shared information, and allows staff and students to readily see who is responsible for specific activities.

One of the most important elements of this department, or any organization, is the quality of the staff employed. The Experimental Program has been extremely successful in attracting and retaining good, qualified staff. The role of staff members cannot be overemphasized, and the absolute need to have qualified, dedicated staff cannot be overlooked. The success of any venture depends upon the people responsible for carrying out the daily activities. Two years ago, the Division of Student Services initiated an award for outstanding employees in the Division, and recognizes two individuals each year. During each of the first two years, one of the two individuals recognized has been a member of the EPHE staff. It is this kind of excellence that makes the real success of the department possible. Staff members are chosen very carefully, in the same manner as students are chosen for admission. Initially, the program is concerned with the academic qualifications of its staff. All staff must have at least a bachelor's degree. Most have, or are very near to completion of their Master's. The degree itself is not the most important indication of successful employment; however, it is a good indication that the individual has some degree of expertise in a particular field. Teaching staff by necessity, must have degrees in the area

of instruction, while other staff have diverse types of academic backgrounds. Most however, because of the nature of their work and interests, have graduate degrees in Educational Psychology, particularly Guidance and Counseling. In addition to academic credentials the program looks for staff members who exhibit other positive, leadership qualities. When hiring staff, the department looks for individuals who have related job or volunteer experiences, who have exceptional verbal skills, both written and oral, who can relate personally to a diverse population, and who are ambitious and promotable. The department knows that most staff members do not intend to make a career out of the EPHE program, but rather plan to use its experiences to further advance themselves. With this in mind the department does a great deal of in-service training, not only to meet the immediate needs of the department, but also to give staff members additional skills and expertise.

Admissions.

As its name implies, this component of the program is responsible for the admission of students. Like many Equal Opportunity Programs, and unlike many others, the Experimental Program is capable of admitting students directly into the university as regular degree candidates. The component serves three basic functions: to recruit students, to screen and admit those who evidence the potential to succeed at UWM, and to make appropriate referral for those whom the program does not have the resources to serve at present.

It is very important that the program be able to admit students directly. Applicants can come directly to the program for admission. Many apply through the Department of Admissions and Records and are referred to EPHE. In either case it is the Experimental Program that makes the final admissions decision. On this campus, like many others, any official with the rank of Dean or above, may admit students on an individual basis who do not otherwise meet standard admission requirements. The Assistant Chancellor has delegated this authority to the Director of EPHE. In looking for indicators of success, the program begins by reviewing the applicants academic background and apparent present skill level. This includes a review of all past academic work at the high school level, and any other formal training experiences he has had. Formal transcripts of all work are required if the applicant is finally admitted into the University. The program also reviews a series of tests that all applicants are asked to take. The battery consists of the ACT, the Nelson-Denny reading test, the numerical section of the College Qualifying test, and an internally developed writing sample. The department evaluates all of these measures looking for some basic level of skill and academic achievement. Initially, the applicant is compared to a standard which the program deems acceptable and uses for a suggested minimal profile. This would consist of a standard composite score on the ACT of 15, an 11th grade total reading level on the Nelson-Denny, an adequate writing sample as evaluated by the department's English instructors, and a 1.9 grade

point average, on a 4.0 scale, from high school. These criteria are used only as initial evaluative devices, and are not used as the sole, nor even the primary basis of admission. Applicants who score well above these suggested guidelines may be refused admission because of severe non-academic problems which will undoubtedly severely hamper their academic success. Such problems could be current financial crisis in the family, going through the process of a divorce at the time of intended admission, or drug addiction. Although the applicant may not be admitted, it is always explained to him the reason for the refusal. Possible alternatives and appropriate referrals are always presented. Applicants are asked to return for admission at some time in the future when the problem has been resolved. Likewise, applicants who do not meet the suggested objective guidelines may be admitted if they exhibit academic potential. In looking for successful students many types of subjective information are used in making final decisions. Previous attempts at higher education or other post-secondary training, marital and family responsibilities, duty in the armed services, and positive job experiences are all evaluated. The applicant's career goals, intended major, and related experiences also play an important part in determining applicants suitability for admission to this university.

Not only the kinds of information which are evaluated in making admissions decisions, but the process of admission itself -- insures that each applicant is given the full benefit of

presenting himself in the best possible light. All applicants meet initially with a professional staff member in the admissions component. This meeting presents information to the applicant about the program and at the same time serves to accumulate some initial information about the student. If the applicant is interested in pursuing admission he will have transcripts sent, and will make arrangements to take the short EPHE test series. Upon receipt of the information, the admission specialist will contact the applicant by phone, and perhaps set up another conference to discuss the test results and answer any questions the applicant may have. After receiving the information, and following further discussion with the applicant, the admission specialist will complete a folder with all of the necessary information, and make a recommendation regarding admission. The folder is then reviewed by the department's admissions committee, which also makes recommendations. After this, the applicant has a personal meeting with an advisor on staff. The purpose of this meeting is to answer any questions which may have come up during the committee review, to have a second individual on staff meet personally with the applicant, and to provide the applicant with much more detailed information about the university and specific curriculum requirements. Generally, the advisor is much more knowledgeable about these requirements than the admissions staff member. If the applicant is still interested at this point he will be scheduled to meet with the Director for a final interview at which time the student is

informed of the final decision. It is important to know that the applicant can stop the process at any time, and the program can make a strong recommendation against admission at any point. Whenever a negative recommendation is made, the applicant is so informed, and is told that he may appeal to the next level.

Most students are referred to the program by word of mouth from other program students, friends, relatives, high school teachers and counselors, employers, and various community agencies. Although this still continues to be true, the program has begun a much more intensive recruiting and public relations program to insure individuals in the community know about the opportunities available. In addition to regular visitations to local high schools, and distribution of program literature, the department has ready access to a divisional Mobile Counseling Unit, a 27 foot camper van which has been altered to do on-the-spot admission and to provide information about the university in the community.

Admissions is the most critical component in the program for obvious reasons. The number of students admitted and the skills which these students bring with them directly affect the operations of the remainder of the program. The size and makeup of the staff depends largely upon the number of students to be served and the specific needs of students enrolled. As with most institutions of higher education, enrollment also provides the base for future funding. A large enrollment increase or decrease

may severely alter the staff needed, while a drastic change in the characteristics of the student population will lead to other necessary changes in the types of services offered. The admission of several hundred students with lower skills than those previously admitted will necessitate additional course offerings both for credit and non-credit, additional advisors, and additional diagnostic devices to determine course placement if all of the students cannot be accommodated in all of the appropriate classes during their initial semester.

Academic Advising.

Academic advising is one of the most common services provided by nearly all education opportunity programs. Unlike the advising that takes place in most institutions by designated faculty at the undergraduate level, Equal Opportunity Programs generally provide much more frequent, intensive one-to-one contact over a prolonged period of time. Generally, undergraduate students are assigned to advisors in an advising office maintained by the school or college in which they intend to major. These are most commonly staffed by either faculty who donate some time apart from other duties, part-time student employees, or a very small staff, often a single individual, who deals with all of the students enrolled. The quality of services received varies with the ratio of students to advisors, and the expertise and dedication of the advisor. The type of academic advising done by Equal Opportunity Programs more closely corresponds to the advising

given upperclassmen or graduate students, where the student works with an individual faculty member in his chosen discipline, who assists the student in planning his program and who provides advice about career possibilities and further educational opportunities within the field.

The assumption of the Experimental Program and other Equal Opportunity Programs is that students need more of this kind of advice during their freshman year than at any other time in their college career. This is the time when students begin to explore completely new horizons, and have the least information about where, how, and who. This is especially true among low-income, minority, disadvantaged, and first generation college students who know few persons who are in a position to give them any meaningful, accurate advice. Therefore, most college freshmen begin to form their views from their own limited perspective, and from conversations with their friends, who are all too often in the same uninformed situation.

Academic advising in the Experimental Program is designed to overcome these problems. Each advisor works with a limited number of students from the day the student is first admitted until the student reaches his junior year successfully and transfers to the department from which he will eventually receive his degree. Working on an individual basis allows the student/advisor relationship to develop over an extended period of time, and allows the advisor to assist the student as his academic experience accumulates and as

his judgment matures. As the student changes direction and interests, the advisor is always available as a resource and guide. It is very important that the advisor has a great deal of information about each student at the time they first meet. Throughout the admission process a great deal of information is generated about each student, and this information is extremely helpful in registering students for the all-important first semester. Test scores, high school transcripts, and student's own interests allow the student and advisor to avoid obviously poor choices for courses during that initial semester. Students placed inappropriately in math or science courses for which they do not have the prerequisite skills do not do well, and have very negative experiences to begin their college careers. With enough information these courses can be avoided initially, and students can be placed in developmental work in these areas prior to enrollment for credit. The student will be enrolled in courses which will enhance his initial chances of success, while developmental work will insure that his chances in other courses is greatly improved.

Few incoming students have any idea that there is a health center on campus, what the deadlines are for registration, filing for financial aids, or paying fees. Most do not have any idea of how to use the library facilities. After enrolling in classes for the first semester, few students could logically explain why they registered for the number of credits they did, or why they are in

the specific courses they are. During that initial period of adjustment, the Experimental Program advisor finds himself providing a great deal of information which is readily available elsewhere, but which the new student does not know how to find, or how to interpret. During this period, at least the first semester, and perhaps longer, the student is required to meet with his advisor once a week. As the student progresses, and becomes more knowledgeable about the university, he needs to see his advisor less often, but for extended periods to discuss the more important aspects of his education.

Once a student has become familiar with the campus, the expectations of instructors, and course demands, he is more free to consider long-term goals. At this point the advisor serves his most useful purpose. All staff advisors in the Experimental Program are full-time professionals employed to assist students with these concerns, and to keep knowledgeable about various changes in curriculum requirements, and career opportunities. At this point in time the student is making critical choices, and is planning graduate studies and/or career plans. The advisor now begins to expand on the students basic knowledge of these areas, explaining the differences between a major in Sociology and Social Welfare, for example. The student must be aware of the fact that the two degrees from UWM are not interchangeable in the job market, but that each is designed for a different purpose. The student who typically wants to help people must know what limitations are imposed by choices of degree. By the time a student reaches his

junior year he should be self-confident enough to make his own way, and should have a good foundation of knowledge upon which to make his own decisions. He must also be aware of other resources available to him. The advisor's real success is measured by the students who reach this point and eventually graduate from the institution. Along the way the advisor learns about the student as an individual and approaches him as such, dealing with his individual problems as they occur, providing information, helping make decisions, and by lending a willing ear to listen when necessary.

Instructional Support.

The Instructional Support component provides credit sections of regular university classes to EPHE students, and is geared toward retaining these students through academic skill development. It is an extremely innovative and complex operation, and will be discussed in detail in the following paper.

In addition to these basic services at the college level, the Experimental Program also maintains a pre-college Upward Bound program. The existence of this component is a direct benefit to the college component in two ways. Obviously, the program serves as a feeder to the college level, and can identify potential college students as early as their sophomore year in high school. This makes planning for college a much less trying experience for the student, and makes college a viable goal. In addition, the existence of the Upward Bound program within EPHE allows the staff

to directly observe students at the high school level, and to see the basic problems individuals have in making the transition from the secondary to the college level. Within this structure the Experimental Program can provide more extensive services to students than any other department on the UWM campus.

Management By Objectives.

One of the significant reasons for the rapid growth and success of the Experimental Program is the management system which it uses to evaluate departmental effectiveness. EPHE recognized very early the importance of establishing measurable objectives and evaluating results based on these objectives.

Results to date have proved the program to be meeting its basic objectives. The department utilizes a management by objectives system to evaluate its progress and to plan for the future. The basic program goals are to see that 33% of all the student admitted will graduate within 6 years of their initial enrollment, and that each semester 60% of all the students enrolled will maintain a grade point average of 2.0 or better on a 4.0 scale. At the end of each semester the department compiles a report on the Characteristics and Performance of the students enrolled. This report provides basic information on the student population and how nearly the goals of the program are being met. To date the results have been more than adequate. Since 1968, 1346 students have been enrolled and as of December 1974, 691, or, over 51% are still enrolled

or have graduated. Of 71 students in the initial group admitted in 1968, 28 or 39.44% are in this category. This figure is certain to increase as the program matures, and will reflect the program's increasing ability to identify and more adequately serve its intended population. Graduates to date, are more a reflection of the program several years ago, and with continual improvements each year, the quantity and quality of graduates will both improve. As of the Fall semester 1974, the program has had 68 students who have graduated from UWM, and an additional 151 students who have successfully transferred from EPHE to their major department and will be graduating in the near future. In terms of grades, each semester the students enrolled in the program far exceed the minimum goals set up by the department as objectives. For the Fall semester 1974, the cumulative average GPA of all students enrolled was a 2.30, and over 75% of all students receiving grades received a 2.0 or better. During the present semester (Spring 1975) the Experimental Program began with 581 students.

The Management by Objective System is more, however, than merely collecting numbers on a regular basis in order to meet reporting deadlines, or to impress the appropriate administrators. It is a real, workable system which allows for planning and evaluation of programatic goals, and assessment of individual employees. The implementation of a good MBO system is a process which actually takes several years, and involves planning and alterations on a

continual basis. Theoretically, MBO is a simple process of establishing and evaluating goals, but in practice it is a slow, painful process of making mistakes, reworking, and hopefully making fewer mistakes each time the process is repeated. A full description of the history of EPHE's experience and current MBO system is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is an important aspect of the total program operation, and it has become a very useful tool in assessing the past results, and future needs of the Experimental Program.

EPHE is continually looking for ways to improve its services and to be more effective. Currently EPHE administrators are looking at specific objectives for the next year and more general objectives for several years in order to insure that adequate planning for on-going operations can be done. These plans will also reflect the input of staff for recommended changes in program policies or procedures. During the past several months a formal committee structure was established to receive and evaluate proposals from staff members. The structure allows staff to become involved in decision-making, and allows administrators, particularly the Director, time to handle other more pressing matters, while staff committees work out details of proposals, and do necessary research.

Several other program changes are being considered at the present time which will, hopefully, increase the program's ability to meet student needs. One proposal recommended the admission of

students with greater academic deficiencies. This involves all the components at the college level. Admissions must establish additional criteria to diagnose specific deficiencies, and must more closely evaluate subjective criteria, like the relationship of internal/external orientation of applicants. The advising component must be prepared to spend additional time and effort with such students in registration and advising sessions. The Instructional Support component will obviously need to either add additional sections of existing courses or expand those sections and be prepared to teach in yet more innovative ways.

This is an example of how the program continually seeks changes to meet needs of students. There is a continual search for new methods to meet such needs within the department. New management techniques, better methods of instruction, better means of identifying and fostering academic potential are always being sought.

EPHE is an accepted department which has proven itself to the campus community, not as a department basically concerned with cultural awareness, or minority rights, but as a part of the mainstream of the university. It takes individuals who have been or would have been excluded by virtue of their academic background and experiences, and provides them with the services necessary for each student to succeed and compete at this or any other university. The past six years have proven that there are many individuals who can and will be successful at the University of Wisconsin -

Milwaukee if given the opportunity, and the prerequisite academic support skills and personal guidance. While the success of each individual student is of the utmost importance to the staff or the program, it is equally important that the experience and knowledge gained, be utilized by the program, the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee community and professionals in education, and higher education particularly. Innovative methods of teaching, identifying, and serving potentially successful students should, if properly reported and researched, have direct benefits for all those involved in higher education in the years ahead.